

News from Ed Markey

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MARKEY CALLS ON RIDGE TO INVESTIGATE SCREENING LAPSE FOR URANIUM SHIPMENT

Washington, DC: Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, today sent a letter to the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, regarding news reports that an ABC News crew was able to ship approximately 15 pounds of depleted uranium in a cargo container from Jakarta, Indonesia to Los Angeles without detection. The letter raises numerous questions about the screening and inspection process for port security and other cargo security programs and calls into question the Bush Administration's priorities in fighting the war on terrorism.

"Last night, I watched an unbelievable report on ABC News that exposed a weakness that terrorists could easily exploit to ship uranium, which can be used to make a dirty bomb," Rep. Markey stated. "Instead of attacking the news media, the Bush Administration should be doing more to correct the vulnerability in our security that this reporting has exposed. President Reagan's motto for dealing with the Soviet Union used to be 'trust, but verify,' President Bush's motto for dealing with cargo security appears to be 'trust the shippers, but don't bother to verify.'"

Rep. Markey continued, "The shipment of depleted uranium, while harmless, is a fair test of the effectiveness of the radiation detection systems employed by the Homeland Security Department, and experts tell me that depleted uranium is actually easier to detect than Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU). That means if we can't pick up the depleted uranium, there's little chance we'll find Highly Enriched Uranium, which can be used to build a nuclear bomb."

"While the Department of Homeland Security apparently targeted this cargo container for heightened screening, it never actually opened the container – the only way that experts believe depleted uranium can be distinguished from HEU. The shipment of the depleted uranium should serve as a wake-up call for the Bush Administration that more needs to be done to tighten security at our ports."

The shipment of uranium traveled from the port in Jakarta to Singapore to Hong Kong. The shipment arrived at the Port of Los Angeles, where it was targeted for screening because it originated from Jakarta. Department of Homeland Security inspectors, without opening the container or physically inspecting its questionable contents, confirmed it was not a danger using x-ray and radiation detection. Homeland Security Undersecretary Asa Hutchinson said inspectors saw no threat after examining the x-ray and radiation detection results, even though the object looks like a pipe bomb because of its unusual density.

For further information, visit www.house.gov/markey.

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